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ABSTRACT

The authors point out that to effectively work with disadvantaged (specifically Black) college students, teachers must make the curriculum reflect on social changes and other phenomena which interest them and should include strategies which appeal to the cultural uniqueness and learning styles of Blacks. Initial sections address the status of Black professionals in the area of special education and learning styles commonly exemplified by Black college students. Noted among instructional strategies that appeal to Blacks are the following: allow more time for mastering material, present sufficient examples to enable getting the point, work to strengthen verbal expression and use of formal language, and allow warmup periods in studying. Reported are results of a survey and research study on 19 master's students in special education from a predominantly Black university. Findings are cited which include that Black college students preferred learning activities closely associated with their career choice and that students in a competency based humanistic teacher education group expressed greater enthusiasm about their learning atmosphere and made higher grades than a competency based teacher education groups. (SB)

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Instructional Strategies that Challenge Black College Students in the Area of Exceptional Child Education

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Instructional Strategies that Challenge Black College Students in the Area of Exceptional Child Education

There is often open and frequent discussion about the disproportionately large number of Black (and culturally diverse) children in classes for the handicapped. A less frequently discussed matter is the small number of and specific training needs for Blacks in teaching and higher decision making positions in special education. Noticeable problems in the preparation of Black special educators include: (1) high attrition rate among Black college students - which may be associated with being turned off by training programs that are inapporpriate with their learning styles, (2) demeaning label that some Blacks associate with special education, (3) failure to certify for a teaching position because of low NTE scores, and (4) problems in procuring key positions of employment.

Reflecting on the first problem area, it is reasonable to feel that teacher training programs should give attention to what training is best suited for what persons. For example, it is thought that distinguishing learning characteristics of disadvantaged students are (1) physical and visual rather than aural, (2) ability to express feelings of emotion, (3) ability to improvise with commonplace materials, and (4) problem-centered rather than abstract-centered. To effectively work with disadvantaged college students, teachers must make the curriculum reflect on social changes and other phenomena of interest to them, offering the most sensitive and alert kind of guidance possible.

The purpose of this presentation is to delineate some teaching strategies which challenge Black college trainees in the area of exceptional child education. While it is felt that all teaching strategies should stress the development of fundamental teacher competencies, the additional concern here is with those strategies that appeal to the cultural uniqueness and learning styles of Blacks.

Before presenting information on specific instructional strategies attention is given to (1) the status of Black professionals in the area of special education and (2) learning styles commonly exemplified by Black college students. Data for the paper are based on a review of related literature, observations, information gathered by conducting surveys, and the results of a more formal research study.

Status of Black Professionals in Special Education

A sharp contrast exists between the number of Blacks in special education classes in the public schools and the number of Black special educators in key positions in the teaching profession. In essence there are many Black students in special classes and few Black special educators in key positions. The discrepancy could be discussed in terms of external forces inherent in our society and internal forces within Blacks that make them less eager to pursue to the fullest opportunities that do exist.

Segregation practices in our society over the years have kept Blacks from obtaining an education commensurate with their white counterparts. Other problems that impede Blacks from earning an education which existed in the past and still exist are (1) required scores on standardized tests for program entry and program graduation, and (2) lack of adequate career counseling in the schools.

It is felt that Blacks often fail to elect special education as a field of study because of its poor appeal. One educator stated that "being Black is one strike against you and studying in special education would only make the second strike against you."

Many Blacks who went into special education did not develop into good role models to attract other Blacks to the field. They are often not adequately represented in key decision making positions, on national conference agenda, and among textbook writers and scholarly researchers.

It has been documented that universities are not training minority individuals

for leadership roles in administration in sufficient numbers (Vance and Howe, 1974). This is significant in view of a concurrent finding that 28.9 percent of the persons trained in special education administration procured employment in college and university teaching positions. When such combinations are put together the problem of gaining adequate Black representation in the profession is compounded.

How Blacks are treated in the university setting is also a factor in their pursuing and completing a professional program of study. Moore (1974) charged that the "take it or leave it" policy employed by universities in training disadvantaged individuals produces serious problems. Only a few can take it and too many of the less motivated leave the scene without obtaining an education. New policies must be adopted to include modification of the curriculum and instructional strategies to meet the needs of Black disadvantaged youths. This is especially true when, for example, a relative large predominately Black university has eighty (80) percent of its enrollment to qualify for federal financial assistance.

Learning Styles

Learning style is viewed as a phenomenon that varies among individuals, is identifiable, and requires complementary instructional methodology or teaching styles (Dunn and et. al., 1977). It consists of distinctive behaviors which serve as indicators of how a person learns from and adapts to his environment (Gregori, 1979).

Considerable attention has focused on how people learn. Charles (1976) pulled together notions of cognitive style from such individuals as Bruner (conservative/gambling focusers), Gardner (leveling/sharpening), Guilford (convergent/divergent), Kagan (impulsive/reflective), Witkin (field-dependent/field-independent), Runner (styles of life/action), Torrance (freedom/control oriented),

and Coop and Brown (analytic/non-analytic). He put the cognitive styles together in teacher recognizeable patterns as (1) adventurers, (2) ponderers, and (3) drifters. The learning styles (patterns) are further discussed in reference to confort conditions which afford the learner special satisfaction and feedback responses which help the learner to improve. It was postulated that teaching strategies (e.g. open experience, individualized, structured individualized, and group instruction) are needed for students based on their learning style, confort conditions, and necessary feedback.

Presenting "styles" as hypothetical constructs to explain the teaching-learning process, Fischer and Fischer (1979) suggested ten learning styles and six teaching styles. The learning styles are: (1) incremental learner, (2) intuitive learner, (3) sensory specialist, (4) sensory generalist, (5) emotionally involved, (6) emotionally neutral, (7) explicitly structured, (8) open-ended structure, (9) damaged learner, and (10) eclectic learner. A description of each was given with suggestions relative to the best learning environment for each type. The teaching styles which differ from a method of instruction are: (1) task-oriented, (2) cooperative planner, (3) child centered, (4) subject centered, (5) learning centered, and (6) emotionally exciting and its counterpart. The authors stated that the styles are not entirely exclusive of each other, e.g. the visual learner can benefit from lecturers and both learning and teaching styles can be modified. The association of intelligence with a particular style of learning was viewed as a misconception.

Dunn and Dunn (1979) discussed teaching style in terms of nine elements. They are (1) educational philosophy, (2) student preferences, (3) instructional planning, (4) student groupings, (5) room design, (6) teaching environment, (7) teaching characteristics, (8) teaching methods, and (9) evaluation techniques.

Limited attention has been given to the development of instruments to assess

individuals' learning styles. Dunn and et.al. (1977) developed an instrument, the Learning Style Inventory (LSI), based on research data that yielded 18 categories which suggest that learners are affected by their (1) immediate environment (sound, temperature, light, and design), (2) emotionality (motivation, responsibility, persistence, and structure), (3) sociological needs (self, pairs, peers, teams, adult, and/or varied), and (4) physical needs (perceptual strengths and/or weaknesses, time of day, intake of food and fluids, and mobility).

The LSI is valid and reliable for grades 3-12, the PEPS - Productivity Environmental Preference Scale, is being tested for adults.

Having discoursed on learning and teaching styles as a general concept, we have come to the point of making inferences relative to Blacks and/or the disadvantaged. Riessman (1966) gave the following characteristics as typical of the deprived child's learning style:

1. physical and visual rather than aural
2. content-centered rather than form-centered
3. externally oriented rather than introspective
4. problem-centered rather than abstract-centered
5. inductive rather than deductive
6. spatial rather than temporal
7. slow, careful, patient, persevering (in areas of importance), rather than quick, clever, facile, flexible

Gregori (1979) recognized that some people operate best in concrete situations, others in abstract situations, and some perform well in both. The same kind of diversity exists with preference for sequential ordering versus nonsequential and functioning independently versus with a group.

Extreme caution should be used in labeling certain groups of people as having specific learning styles. Great diversity is sure to exist. However, Almanza and Mosley (1980) discussed individual traits or learning styles with implications relative to race and ethnicity. The style, movement repertoire relates to active/passive behavior. It was reported that Black children tend to possess a richer movement repertoire than Euro-American children. This type of behavior tends not to satisfy normative standards.

The other pattern was perceptual style (field dependent versus field independence) and cognitive style (reflectivity versus impulsivity). It was reported that the field dependent/impulsive characteristics often profile the exceptionally culturally diverse child.

There are benefits to be derived from matching teaching styles with learning styles. Among them are improved mental health, self understanding, and learning (Gregori, 1979). It has been said that when taught through methods that complement learning characteristics, students at all levels become increasingly motivated and achieve better academically (Dunn and et.al., 1977; Dunn and Dunn, 1979). A common notion seems to be that if teachers work with students through their learning styles, success will be realized and there will exist a humanistic, caring, nurturing atmosphere.

Instructional Strategies that Appeal to Blacks

An overly simplified response to this topic could be very misleading. It should be kept in mind that much variability exists with Blacks in terms of learning styles and the kinds of instructional strategies needed vary accordingly. These premises are to be kept in mind as the topic is expounded upon.

A general principle in education is that learning should proceed in an order consistent with the logic of the subject matter and psychological nature of the student. Material is best learned in stages, over a period of time, through an enlargement on or an assimilation of previously gained information (Lampley, 1979).

Riesman (1966) provided some general principles for teaching deprived children. They are:

1. Allow more time for mastering material
2. Present sufficient examples to enable getting the point
3. Work to strengthen verbal expression and use of formal language
4. Make use of performance activities, role-playing, use of physical and concrete expressions
5. Allow warm-up periods in studying
6. Pin abstractions to the immediate, the sensory, the topical
7. Let external stimulation precede the inner development
8. Make many activities into a game format

9. Make use of teaching machines
10. Use experience - centered learning attuned to the pace of the child
11. Be lively - "win the children to learning"

The rest of this presentation is limited to a survey and research study conducted on college students in a predominantly Black university.

The authors observed some basic practices employed in training teachers in a preparation program. Identified were 16 major learning activities.

A semantic differential approach was used to determine the extent to which the learning activities appealed to students. The nineteen (19) subjects were studying at the master's level in the field of special education, mainly female, and predominantly Black. Ten sets of adjectives, expressing the positive and negative extremes on a seven point scale, were incorporated on the survey form for each learning activity.

The survey form was administered to the students with the instructions - using the adjectives provided beneath each type of instructional activity, make a mark on the scale to indicate how the activity appeals to you as a student. Statistical analysis consisted of tallying responses, arriving at a mean for each adjective and a mean for each learning activity. The latter mean was used in ranking the learning activities from highest (number 1) to lowest (number 16) appeal. Table 1 contains the activities, mean rating, and rank order of the means.

Insert Table 1 about here

By rank order, the learning activities that appealed most to the students were (1) teach children, (2) tutor a child, (3) demonstrate teaching strategies, and (4) take fieldtrips, respectively. Learning activities with the least appeal were (16) view charts, graphs, etc. (15) use libraries, (14) conduct interviews, and (13) view films, respectively.

Table 1

Learning Activities
And Their Appeal to Black College Students

Learning Activities	Means	Ranks
1. Oral reports	5.2	12
2. Written reports	5.7	6
3. Viewing charts, graphs,	4.26	16
4. Fieldtrips	5.9	4
5. Conducting interviews	5.03	14
6. Participating in seminars	5.54	10
7. Use libraries	5.01	15
8. Read professional journals	5.60	9
9. View films	5.16	13
10. Use test instruments	4.62	8
11. Participate in practica	5.21	11
12. Demonstrate teaching strategies	5.93	3
13. Evaluate teaching effectiveness	5.71	5
14. Make learning centers	5.68	7
15. Tutor a child	6.13	2
16. Teach children	6.34	1

Mean ratings were also computed for each of the ten adjective sets. For example the learning activity "teach children" was rated on the high side as good, sharp, lively, warm, and friendly. Lowest ratings for the activity were tense and sad (see Table 2). The learning activity "view charts, graphs,

Insert Table 2 about here

and etc," which was viewed as having the overall lowest appeal to the students, was rated on the high side as good, sweet, and warm. Lowest ratings for the activity were dull and boring.

Based on the findings from this pilot survey, the major speculations are that Black college students (1) prefer learning activities that are closely associated with their career choice - in this situation, teaching and (2) they rate the fundamental learning activities highest in terms of being "good" and lowest in terms of being "tense." The findings also have some implications for notions given in the literature relative to the learning styles of Blacks.

In a more formal research study Gentry and Wen (In press) investigated the effectiveness of a designed teaching strategy used with Black college students. A description and the results of the study are provided.

It had been observed that college students in special education and related areas were increasingly expressing interest in teaching that contained substantive matter presented in an appealing manner. So the purpose of the study was to compare student preceptions of two instructional approaches, competency based teacher education (CBTE) and a devised approach-competency based humanistic education (CBHE), relative to the extent to which the methods entailed competency based and humanistic teaching characteristics.

The authors incorporated characteristics of behaviorism and humanism and initiated the instructional strategy which was arbitrarily entitled competency based humanistic education (CBHE). Characteristics of existing CBTE approaches

Table 2

Adjective Means for "Teach Children"

Adjectives	Mean Ratings
Good/bad	6.53
Sharp/Dull	6.47
*Sour/Sweet	6.38
*Sad/Happy	6.06
*Boring/Interesting	6.39
Lively/Dull	6.47
Clear/Confusing	6.38
Relaxed/Tense	5.82
*Cold/Warm	6.47
Friendly/Unfriendly	6.47

*Inverted order was adjusted in mean computation

can be summarized as (1) explicitly defined learning competencies, (2) individualized assistance available to the learner, (3) pre-established criteria for successful completion of competencies, and (4) predominately teacher-directed instruction. The CBHE approach was structured to include the first three factors above, plus (1) alternative competencies from which students could choose, (2) student-choice in selection of competencies, and (3) student-facilitated instruction (all sitting in circle and students encouraged to freely participate in discussion).

Subjects consisted of students in two special education classes at the graduate level. One class was randomly assigned as the experimental group and taught by the CBHE approach and the other class served as the control group with CBTE as the method of instruction. Both methods contained common competency features with CBHE possessing additional features considered to be humanistic. Pre- and post-assessments were made on student perceptions. It was found that the CBHE group perceived their method as more favorably expousing humanistic as well as competency characteristics when compared to perceptions of the CBTE group.

Based on the study it seemed reasonable to conclude that college teaching can be competency based and humanistic in approach, and in effect, be more readily viewed as such by the students than other conventional approaches. Also noteworthy were the facts that students in the CBHE group expressed greater enthusiasm about their learning atmosphere and made higher grades as a group than the CBTE group.

It has been observed that either CBTE or a humanistic approach emphasized in isolated tends to have severe limitations. The conventional CBTE approach is often viewed as "cold natured" and barren in respect to certain individual needs. Education which is basically humanistic in nature frequently leads

to an outcry from facets of the population for attention to the basic fundamentals of knowledge. CBHE as delineated in the present study merges the two approaches, thereby, capitalizing on the strengths of both. It accentuates an academic environment which encompasses skills and competencies relevant to the needs and interests of learners. If further developed and adequately executed, it is felt that CBHE could become a beacon in higher education; turning learners on as they master skills geared to their professional aspirations and turning educators on as they fulfill their accountability expectations to students and the institution of which they are employed.

Summary and Conclusions

A rationale was put forth for recruiting more Black college students in the field of special education and for meeting their unique educational needs. Attention was also given to teaching and learning styles with particular implications for Blacks. It was not established that all Blacks exemplified a particular learning style nor was it established that all Blacks respond equally as well to a particular teaching style. The position of the authors is that learning and teaching styles should be studied in terms of their effectiveness in training Black college studies.

It was speculated from the results of a survey that Blacks tend to find learning activities closest associated with their career goal most appealing. Perhaps a key factor to remember in training Blacks is curriculum and activity relevance. Teachers should be able to demonstrate and point out how various instructions impact on the teaching career that Blacks have chosen.

Current emphasis is on addressing the issue of cultural diversity in our society. It is therefore incumbent upon university personnel to identify and employ instructional strategies that have appeal and at the same time meet the educational needs of Black college students.

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